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SUBJECT: BOSNIA -- REPUBLIKA SRPSKA PRESS CRITICIZES
BOSNIAN PARTICIPATION IN GEORGIAN NATO EXERCISE

¶1. (U) Republika Srpska (RS) based press and a parliamentarian from right-wing RS Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) are publicly criticizing Bosnia's planned participation in the NATO PfP Cooperative Longbow-Cooperative Lancer (exercise) in Tbilisi, Georgia from May 6 to June 1. Bosnia's MOD has publicly confirmed the participation of 17 military personnel, which was approved by Bosnia's Tri-Presidency as part of the Ministry of Defense 2009 training plan.

¶2. (SBU) The sensationalist RS-based Fokus newspaper published an article quoting Slobodan Saraba, an SDS parliamentarian, criticizing Bosnia's participation in the exercise on the basis that Moscow would view it as a hostile act. He urged that Bosnia follow Serbia and cancel their participation. The article also quoted Gostimir Popovic, a (self-appointed) anti-NATO political commentator based in Banja Luka, saying that Bosnia's participation in the exercise will do tremendous damage to Bosnia's relationship with Russia. Popovic added that the exercise was the result of "U.S. dictation". Anatolij Pomorcev, a Russian commentator, was quoting saying that Russia is aware that Bosnia does not have full sovereignty and cannot protect the domestic will of the people, especially those in the RS. Pomorcev added (without substantiation) that soldiers from the RS will not participate and that the official position of the RS was to not support the exercise. In a separate news item, RS National Assembly member Petar Djokic (Socialist Party of Republika Srpska) commented that while Bosnia should participate in NATO exercises, it would be "advisable" not to participate in this exercise so as not to provoke Russia. (COMMENT: Saraba has historically opposed Bosnia's deployments to international peacekeeping missions, including the nine deployments to Iraq and the recent deployment of officers to ISAF. Popovic and Saraba have often voiced their opposition to NATO exercises in Fokus, rather than the more mainstream RS newspaper Nezavisne Novine. Their anti-NATO, anti-U.S. sentiment has not yet stirred serious opposition to Bosnia's deployments to peacekeeping missions or NATO exercises. END COMMENT.)

¶3. (SBU) Bosnia has planned its participation in the exercise for over one year. Russian diplomats met Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials April 23 to protest Bosnia's participation, and gave the MFA a non-paper that was identical to Russia's recent letter to NATO SYG Jaap de Hoop Scheffer about the exercise. Officials from both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense have confirmed publicly and to us that Bosnia will participate. Participation in the exercise figured in the training portion of Ministry of Defense's 2009 annual plan which was approved by Bosnia's Tri-Presidency. General Secretary of the Presidency Ranko Ninkovic told us that the three members of the Presidency never specifically discussed Bosnia's

participation in the exercise and perfunctorily approved the MOD's annual plan. Ninkovic (a Bosnian-Serb) believes that the Minister of Defense is acting completely within in his mandate by ordering participation in the absence of a legal act forbidding it.

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